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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the nature of creativity and blockages to its expression especially in home and school settings in South Africa. A definition of creativity is offered which stresses the production of an original outcome or achievement. The creative process is broken down into the steps of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Blockages within the child are identified next and include lack of time, habits, anxiety and fear of failure, fear of what others may think, and a feeling of inferiority. Among blockages to creativity located in parents are over-emphasis on success, inability to provide opportunities and stimulation for the child, autocratic discipline and rigidity, and evaluation at too early a stage. Specific blockages to creativity relating to the school include the emphasis of most syllabi on convergent thinking and teachers who present subject matter in a rigid manner, over-organize classroom activities, lack a sense of humor, use too much competition, implement an autocratic disciplinary code, and do not allow mistakes. Also serving as a block to creativity are the present examination system in South Africa and community values which stress competition and conformity. (DB)

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BLOCKAGES TO CREATIVITY

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SOME BLOCKAGES TO CREATIVITY

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Before any blockages or obstacles are discussed, I want to define creativity as I see it. There is no generally accepted definition for or theory of creativity. Each researcher defines creativity to suit his particular circumstances and specific research project. Creativity is such a complex and flexible phenomenon that a generally accepted definition is impossible.

The terms "novelty and utility" are often used to describe the creative product. These two terms are interrelated and interdependent. Rollo May (1959, p.57) agreed with this perspective by saying that creativity is "the process of bringing something new into birth". Margaret Mead (in Anderson, 1959, p. 223) elaborated on this idea by writing "... to the extent that a person makes, invents, thinks of something that is new to him, he may be said to have performed a creative act".

I find Torrance's (1962) definition most appropriate and acceptable when he writes that creativity is "the process of sensing gaps or missing elements and forming ideas or hypotheses concerning them". He goes further by saying that after one has become aware of the deficiencies and gaps in knowledge and after trying to find the solutions, testing and retesting and modifying them, one must finally communicate the results.

I personally see creativity as a creative force or ability producing an original, new product or achievement - the outcome of a spontaneous, original, imaginative resourcefulness of the highly creative person (Olivier, 1978, p. 12). It is the search for the truth on the other side of the logical. My emphasis is on originality.

In his work "The religion of man", Tagore (1961) pointed out that man has a

surplus of mental and vital energy which is far in excess of that needed to satisfy his biological needs. We must still determine, if that is possible, the virtually limitlessness of potentiality which the human being possesses. It is this surplus of mental and vital energy which impels the highly creative person to achieve in a highly creative manner. We all possess this surplus - to a greater or lessor degree. What do we do with it - exploit it or allow the system to inhibit or block it? And if we accept this hypothesis or theory that we all possess this surplus of energy, I wonder why the world is not stunned by the creative ingeniousness of the highly creative. Why the struggle for survival if we have the creative potential and creative geniuses with us? The vital question to be answered is: What stops or inhibits creativity?

Before we can answer this question, we must first briefly look at the creative process. This might throw light on the possible blockages to creativity.

1.2 THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The question is often raised as to whether creative thinkers follow any discernible pattern in the creative process. The diversity of definitions and theories makes it virtually impossible to determine any specific stops in the creative process, but what follows is an attempt to distinguish such stages or steps. This was first attempted by Wallas (1926). The following four stages discussed here form an inseparable whole.

1.2.1 Preparation

The creative thinker must have a period of preparation before he can realise his concept or creative achievement. The highly creative thinker first ponders for some time, reflects, considers, collects data, questions certain points, reads, even makes notes before proceeding to the creative action itself. He needs time to prepare himself and to give his ideas free reign, and only then can he realize them meaningfully and creatively. To do this he must have

mastered his medium of creative action. In the course of his preparation he must therefore broaden his knowledge and improve his proficiency. This phase requires effort, concentration and industry for the ideas to clarify. Time is of the essence.

1.2.2 Incubation

The period of conscious preparation is followed by one of unconscious activity. Rugg (1963, p. 6) calls this an "interlude in which the worker apparently gives up, pushes the problem back or down or out of mind ... leaving it for the unconscious to work upon". This is also commonly known as the phase of frustration.

Sometimes the creative thinker wants to share his ideas with others so as to obtain feedback, before returning to his own cognitions. This free-ranging unconscious activity provides the basis for creative thought. There must be time to ponder the new creation, practise skills, to be challenged by the idea or problem, and time to render it in that person's own distinctive way.

The moment of inspiration is when all the fragmented bits emerge into a new synthesis. Part of the work during this phase is to eliminate the trivial, the commonplace and mediocre to arrive at this new creative performance. The moment of illumination occurs when the long persued original idea suddenly materializes.

1.2.3 Illumination

This moment is the climax of the creative process. Suddenly all the thinker's ideas merge into a solution, a whole. There is a blaze of insight. A solution or new idea suddenly appears as if from nowhere - sometimes in the midst of some other activity.

The unconscious mentioned in the previous paragraph provided the raw materials. The intellect processed and checked these. Illumination heralds the ecstatic

moment - the "aha erlebnis", the "I've got it"!

That which has been illumined still needs to be verified.

1.2.4 Verification

Verification or reviewing is the final phase of the creative process. Inspiration was necessary for creative growth, but now the intellect and judgment must see to it that the work started by the imagination is completed. Self-analysis, critical evaluation, reformulation and self-examination are needed to sift what is valid from the dross. The creative idea must be polished until it is acceptable. Enthusiasm is very necessary throughout this period because if interest wanes, creative achievement will suffer.

Thus the process of verification, when the findings of the moment of inspiration are consciously processed, modified and adjusted, appears to conclude the creative process. Sometimes verification is accompanied by fresh insights, and the creative thinker may reconsider his problem afresh, thus setting off the whole process all over again.

1.3 SOME BLOCKAGES TO CREATIVITY

If the very wide field of the creative phenomenon is analysed, it is not surprising to note the many eventualities which may curb or block creativity. Some of these blockages will be discussed here under the categories; in the child himself, the parents, the teachers and schools and the community. It is even possible that the same blockages can be caused by the pupil himself, the parent and the teacher. A certain degree of overlapping has to be acknowledged.

1.3.1 The highly creative child

1.3.1.1 Lack of time

Time is of the essence in many spheres of life today. If the creative child

is pressed for time, it is possible that no creative achievement will be reached. It is hard to be creative if results are demanded and deadline dates are on your doorstep. One must act or react so immediately that time for thinking and being creative and original is wanting. The incubation phase might even vanish with negative effects for the creative process. One cannot invest in time by being creative when a time limit is hanging over one's head. This must surely be a blockage for the creative child (Johnson, 1973, pp.1-7). Creativity cannot be hastened. The whole process must take its course.

1.3.1.2 Habits

Most of the human being's daily life and activities are automatic and habitual (Olson, 1980, p. 25). Any stereotyped form of response is usually uncreative. There is no originality, nothing new and nothing exciting in such a habit. It is the doing of the same thing in the same ways always. Actions are performed automatically without having to think. Mental habits are obstacles on the road to a highly creative achievement or solution. The solution to this problem depends on the ability to overcome this obstacle (habit) to creative thinking.

1.3.1.3 Anxiety and fear of failure

The pressure to succeed always, can be so severe that the creative child can develop such a state of anxiety that it may inhibit his venturesomeness and desire to explore and to take risks. The highly creative child is a very sensitive and emotional person. Any anxiety will be experienced by him in greater measure than in any other child. The fear of risk-taking and failure can cause the creative person to carry on with the generally accepted and to conform to such an extent that no creative achievement can materialize. Anxiety may even disturb a child's receptiveness for new imaginings or new ideas.

Anxiety can become such a blockage that the experiencing of ecstacy and the contributing toward a new invention or better standard of living, - can

fade away and can leave us all the poorer with an unfulfilled person and ultimately a dissatisfied and unhappy society. The highly creative child needs a sympathetic, understanding and empathetic parent, teacher and society to help him to become what his potentiality should allow him to become.

Olson (1980, p. 32) said that "We can avoid failure and creativity in many ways; by over-conforming, never trying anything different, making sure that we use only proven ideas and walking only worn paths". But in trying to avoid failure, is this not sometimes the way to become a failure as a human being? The slogan that success breeds success is true. Equally true, however, is the fact that "nothing is more of a failure than failing to try" (Olson, 1980, p. 33).

The child's fear of failure can cause anxiety with the result that the craving for creativity from within is blocked causing an unhappy unfulfilled life.

1.3.1.4 What others may think

In conjunction with the previous obstacle, we find that many pupils and even adults are so unduly concerned about what other people may think about them, that the creative process is blocked. If the child must satisfy the opinion of others he will never satisfy his own creative conscience. This undue concern will lead to conformity with an acceptance of the status quo as the outcome, and a blockage to creativity.

1.3.1.5 A feeling of inferiority

Many factors can contribute to a feeling of inferiority. Parents and teachers can be major contributors by undue and perhaps unfair criticism of the child's work. This criticism can lead to a child feeling that his contribution is of inferior quality and not up to standard. The criticism may be either premature or even unduly harsh. Any suspension of evaluation and criticism of the highly creative child's work can only be to his advantage.

If an outsider's criticism is experienced very intensely, the child might develop a feeling of inferiority which may unquestionably hamper his creativity. However if criticism is untrue and negative, the highly creative person usually will ignore it. This type of reaction will however differ from person to person.

1.3.2 Parents

1.3.2.1 Over-emphasis on success

Parents are often over-anxious about their children's creative abilities and expect them to succeed every time a new project or "brain wave" is tackled. The creative process is, however, an intricate, complex and often vague pro= cess with the outcome unpredictable. A lot of hard work is necessary in the early stages before the illumination phase is realized. Many parents expect the child not to make any mistakes, yet, by allowing mistakes or showing more tolerance, the creative process is given the opportunity to develop even more intricately and perhaps with more originality resulting in a highly creative performance.

The fear of being unsuccessful can cause the creative child to refrain from attempting something new and original. This blockage can cause the child to conform to such an extent that his creative abilities will be brought to nought.

1.3.2.2 Lack of opportunities and stimulation

It is the duty of parents to provide the child suitable opportunities and stimulation to develop his creativity. Together with these opportunities, the parents will also have to supply the necessary facilities or amenities. These are essential for exploration and practise and can serve as a fertile field for the child's creative ideas.

Where these opportunities, interests and stimulation are lacking, the child will experience a blockage to his creativity. This is the situation in those homes where parents do not realise their responsibilities towards their highly creative children.

1.3.2.3 Autocratic discipline and rigidity

Where the what, where, how and when are fixed by the parent together with a very rigid mode of discipline, any creativity, originality or spontaneity will be out of the question. The highly creative child must be placed in a position where he can give vent to his ideas and thoughts to enable the creative process to take its course. Too rigid a discipline will hamper creativity.

Where the mother especially over-emphasises order and cleanliness creativity may be obstructed. The highly creative mind is often in a state of chaos, ambiguousness and frustration during the initial phases of creativity. Hard work and diligence can bring order to the process and with the necessary inspiration insight and hence illumination can break through. If disorder= liness of the mind is possible then disorderliness is also possible in his daily life. The over-emphasis on orderliness and its enforcement by strict discipline can only obstruct and hamper creativity. A balance between freedom and discipline must be found.

1.3.2.4 Evaluation

The parent is often tempted to evaluate the work of the highly creative child at too early a stage. The same effect as for the over-emphasis on success above will result. The creative child's creativity will be inhibited because of this early evaluation and the blockage thus caused will stop him from producing any further original and creative work.

1.3.3 The school

The main objective of any school should be the realisation of the child's full

. It is still expected to the pupils to demonstrate their intelligence from time to time in order to repeat facts learnt off by heart. Reproduction is the only aim while creative, original answers are usually unacceptable.

These are some of the characteristics which cause the highly creative pupil to revolt against the school and everything which goes with it. The system can therefore also be a blockage to creativity.

Mr Chairman, let us now turn to more specific blockages relating to the school.

1.3.3.1 Syllabi

If the present syllabi are analysed, we find that little provision is made for the highly creative pupil. There is provision for the highly intelligent child, because the emphasis is on convergent thinking and there is little scope for divergent thinking.

More can be done in connection with the general education and stimulation of the child in order to provide for a well-rounded person. The subject-matter and the presentation of it is too directive, rigid and stereotyped. Minimum opportunities are allowed for creative thinking.

Any closed type of syllabus will have a negative effect on the creativity of the pupil thus causing a blockage. Such a syllabus will offer no challenge to the highly creative child and will cause him to be distracted, bored and even to become an early school leaver.

1.3.3.2 The teacher

The teacher is perhaps the most important instigator of creativity - or perhaps the main killer! Some teachers are so rigid in their presentation of subject-matter and method used that when they are confronted by the the highly creative child, they build up an aggressive attitude because they

potential. It is also the duty of the school to see to it that this poten= tial is developed to the benefit of, not only the pupil, but also the community at large. The pupil must be educated and trained to take his place in all spheres of life and the school will only succeed here if provision is made for most forms of creativity. The teacher plays an important role in this respect.

The question now arises as to whether the school can obstruct the creative process. Is it possible that the present school system can inhibit the creative potential of pupils? To answer this question one must first analyse the present school system in South Africa. Perhaps a few other countries might find similar tendencies in their systems.

Various needs of pupils have already been identified by the education departments and attention is being paid to these needs. We must be thankful for those administrators and planners with vision. However, when the position of the highly creative child is investigated, we find that much in the field of educational renewal is still to be done.

It is necessary to give a summary of the characteristics of the present school system compared with some years ago.

- Pupils still attend school for twelve years - about one fifth of their life span.
- The school is usually a rigid organisation, autocratic and unsusceptible to change.
- The teacher is still the central figure in many a classroom. He does the talking while the pupils sit and listen.
- Reading from the text-book is still the most popular, yet sterile teaching method. The teacher who still accepts the text-book as the only true source of information reveals a rigidity and uncertainty which does not tally with creativity.

cannot manage or cope with the situation. The result is disasterous for the creative potential in the child.

The teacher who over-organises his classroom activities may cause blockages to creativity. Over-organisation is anathema to the highly creative pupil because he does not want to conform to stereotype classroom activities. Instead, the teacher must place a high priority on self-activity, spontaneity and democratic guidance. If this is not the case, a static, inhibiting effect on creativity will result.

The teacher of a highly creative child must possess a good sense of humour. If he cannot stand a reasonable degree of playfulness, he will block creativity by his actions. Because of the highly creative pupil's ability to grasp a situation quickly, to elaborate on various aspects or views and to be witty, it will be necessary for a teacher to understand him and often to return a witty comment. Some teachers even punish pupils who show evidence of playfulness and intellectual scepticism.

Where a teacher makes too much use of competition it is possible that the highly creative child will withdraw himself. His good ideas might be regarded as "off the beaten track" or "way-out" with the result that his share in the competition might became an embarrassment for himself or even his peer group. The teacher might even be biased in his classroom competition. This possible prejudice might be the blockage causing the highly creative pupil to depart from his new idea. Withdrawal from any competitive work might be the result.

A teacher who follows and very autocratic disciplinary code in the classroom will likewise hamper creativity. It is again a matter of finding a balance between freedom and authority. The teacher with a democratic approach will most probably get the cooperation of the highly creative pupil. Together they can plan and work towards a goal, with a creative performance in mind. The pupil can make use of a safe, secure classroom atmosphere to explore and

work towards a mutual goal - an original activity and perhaps an original solution or achievement. A cold classroom atmosphere, together with a rigid and very strict teacher can become the blockage on the road to something useful and new.

The teacher who does not allow any mistakes made in his classroom can also contribute towards a blockage to creativity. The highly creative child will surely make mistakes in his search for solutions and new ideas. The teacher must try to analyse the mistake in order to get behind the reasoning of the child. A mistake can be the starting point to a new creative process, leading to a completely novel idea. If a mistake is summarily rejected, the creativity in the child will die. He must be put in a position where he can explore, take risks, venture and even fail, but at the same time know that his attempts will be appreciated and that he will not be humiliated by his teacher.

1.3.3.3 The present examination system

The present examination system is criticized by many but the question to be answered is: What can we put in its place? There must be a form of evaluation. The present system makes provision for the child who can remember well - the convergent thinker. The person who can think along divergent lines, who can come up with original answers, is ignored. It is even possible to postulate that the present examination system is an anti-instrument for creative thinking. The outcome is that we find so many "rebels" in our classrooms.

The time limit in any examination paper can be a further blockage to creativity. Enough time is a necessity for the creative process to take its course. Presently there is no clear-cut solution to this problem. A type of evaluation is necessary and a type of examination system must be worked out where provision is also made for the child with creative thoughts. It will take highly creative people to solve this problem.

1.3.3.4 The community

Mr Chairman, most of the above-mentioned blockages are also applicable in the broader society. I am just going to mention a few very briefly.

The community is often setting too high objectives which may even be un= realistic. This may serve as a blockage to any child's creative abilities and attempts.

Competition within the community is becoming more and more severe. The highly creative person prefers to work as an individual. Competition with others might inhibit his creativity because he does not want to work under the pressure of various rules and regulations. Competition with the self might be more wholesome. With too many competitive circumstances, time is usually of the essence and an extra-ordinary performance is expected with every attempt. Where these circumstances prevail it will usually serve as a blockage and not as an incentive to the highly creative pupil.

Torrance (1963, p. 54) writes that "many social pressures stressed at home and in the community interfere with the creative process". The child is subjected to conformity, with the result that his actions and thoughts become more commonplace, more obvious and less risky. There is a tendency to describe the highly creative child as one with "wild and silly ideas" (Torrance, 1961, p. 34). This might even cause a psychological estrangement with a tendency to go back to conformation resulting in a negative outcome for the creative process.

The socio-economic circumstances of the family within the community can also serve as a blockage to creativity. The highly creative child needs oppor= tunities and amenities to motivate and stimulate his thoughts. A good socio-economic environment can provide the necessary opportunities but a poor environment can take the edge off the child's creative performance. A good socio-economic environment can create opportunities rich in variety and so

stimulating that its appeal can spark off the creative flame. A poor environment will stifle the latent potential of children.

1.4 Closing remarks

No human being, highly creative or not, can grow up in a vacuum. The environment will influence his creative abilities directly. The parent, teacher and community must give very high priority to the development of the highly creative child and do their utmost to remove any possible blockages to creative potential. Creative ability is mankind's greatest natural asset. South Africa and the world needs each and every highly creative person. Only the best, original and imaginative methods will be good enough to solve the problems of tomorrow. No parent or teacher should therefore, underestimate the creative ability of its youth's potential. If we want to make highly creative adults of our highly creative children, we will have to encourage and support them. Any possible blockage must be removed in order to achieve this important objective. The creative power and energy invested will in the end bear the highest interest.

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